

# 1 Soul Collage® With Social Workers: A Visual Essay on Self-Care & Collective Care

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4 **Abstract:** Social workers are at risk for compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress,  
5 vicarious traumatization, and professional burnout (Newell & MacNeil, 2010; Skovholt &  
6 Trotter-Mathison, 2011). Although self-care is widely regarded as essential for practitioner  
7 wellbeing, its implementation is often challenging due to overwhelming needs and limited  
8 resources (Neenan & Whelan, 2025). Collective care, an orientation that emphasizes concern for  
9 others' wellbeing and promotes collaborative responsibility for both individual and societal  
10 health, is essential in organizational culture to meet the same goals (Mehreen and Gray, 2018). In  
11 order to support both the self-care and collective care of social work students and professionals,  
12 an in-person continuing education workshop featuring the SoulCollage® process was completed  
13 and facilitated by a trained SoulCollage® facilitator, the author. SoulCollage® was developed by  
14 Seena Frost (2010) as an intuitive process to foster inner knowing. Inspired by Oliveira (2025), a  
15 visual essay of five created SoulCollage® cards is presented. Engaging in the SoulCollage®  
16 process in community allows social workers to engage in both self-care and collective care.

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19 Social work professionals practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations and  
20 communities at the micro, mezzo, and macro level. Despite the rewards that the profession can  
21 yield; i.e. compassion satisfaction (Conrad & Kellar-Guenther, 2006); social workers are at risk  
22 for compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, vicarious traumatization, and  
23 professional burnout (Newell & MacNeil, 2010; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011).

24 The National Association of Social Workers and the Council of Social Work Education have  
25 thus encouraged social work professionals and students to practice self-care as a tool to prevent  
26 such risk factors. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (2008) issued a policy  
27 statement defining self-care as “a core essential component to social work practice and reflects a  
28 choice and commitment to become actively involved in maintaining one’s effectiveness as a  
29 social worker” (p. 269).

30 Although self-care is widely regarded as essential for practitioner wellbeing, its implementation  
31 is often challenging due to overwhelming needs and limited resources (Neenan & Whelan, 2025).  
32 Lee and Miller (2013) propose that the social work profession needs to center self-care to both  
33 empower and maintain the well-being of professionals. At the same time, the implementation of  
34 self-care is often challenging due to overwhelming needs and limited resources (Neenan &  
35 Whelan, 2025). Collective care is essential in organizational culture to meet the same goals.  
36 Mehreen and Gray (2018) defined collective care as an orientation that emphasizes concern for  
37 others' wellbeing and promotes collaborative responsibility for both individual and societal  
38 health. They further argued that collective care must address intersectional oppressions and  
39 systemic barriers by fostering mutual responsibility and empowerment among all individuals.

40 In order to support both the self-care and collective care of social work students and  
41 professionals, an in-person continuing education workshop featuring the SoulCollage® process  
42 was completed and facilitated by a trained SoulCollage® facilitator, the author. SoulCollage®  
43 was developed by Seena Frost (2010) as an intuitive process to foster inner knowing. “The  
44 SoulCollage® process of selecting images and making personal cards [serves] as a daily  
45 reminder to handcraft your own life, to choose pieces that fit together meaningfully and with  
46 joy-both for you and for the planet” (Frost, 2010). Inspired by Oliveira (2025), a visual essay of  
47 five created SoulCollage® cards is presented.

48 The workshop took place in March 2026. March is also Social Work Month in the United States  
49 and the theme was “Social Workers: Uplift. Defend. Transform” (socialworkers.org). The  
50 workshop participants included one Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) student, three Masters of  
51 Social Work (MSW) students, seven MSW degree-holding professionals. Out of the seven MSW  
52 degree-holding professionals, four hold doctoral degrees and one is a doctoral student. Three  
53 individuals present at the workshop had created SoulCollage® cards previously. The facilitator  
54 is both an MSW degree-holding professional and a doctoral degree holder.

55 The workshop began with introductions and overview of the program. Then, the facilitator  
56 reviewed the Shared Agreements, in order to create a collective space for participants. Next, a  
57 brief presentation was given covering the basics of SoulCollage®, the card making process, and  
58 the “I Am One Who” exercise. Participants were given space to ask questions or provide  
59 comments about the process. Next, participants were given time to make SoulCollage® cards.  
60 Supplies were available on site for participants.

61 When all participants had completed at least one SoulCollage® card, they were given the option  
62 to either journal individually about their card or work with a partner using the “I Am One Who”  
63 exercise.

64 The “I Am One Who” exercise allows the participant to look at their created card and speak as  
65 the image in the card. “First gaze deeply at your image. Is it a person? A child? Is it an animal?  
66 Perhaps a cat? Is it a non-being? Perhaps a tree? Step into the image and feel its energy, its  
67 mood, its intention. Imagine it has a history, and that it has a voice. Begin to speak, or rite if you  
68 are journaling, sing the words, *I Am One Who...* and go on from there, describing yourself as if  
69 you were the image, where you are, what you are doing, giving little personal descriptions:”  
70 (Frost, 2010, p. 99)

71 After this process, participants were given the opportunity to share takeaways in the large group.  
72 The workshop ended with final questions and a wrap-up on how to continue practicing  
73 SoulCollage®.

74 Some participants at the workshop gave permission for their completed SoulCollage® card  
75 imagery and “I Am The One Who” message to be shared. What follows are some of the creations  
76 and insights from this process.

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79 I am one who brings lightness & freshness during the chaotic waves of life.

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82 I Am One Who...

83 Loves joy

84 Goes after what I want

85 Shows out no matter what

86 With a loud laugh

87 Kissed by the sun

88 What I want from you is...What I want you to know, to do, or to remember...What I want from

89 you is...

90 Your trust  
91 Remember your ability  
92 My gift to you is....What I give you is...  
93 Pleasure  
94 Patience and understanding  
95 The ability to tolerate with ease  
96 Peace  
97 You will remember when...  
98 The breath is light  
99 The bass is loud  
100 The tears flow  
101 Is there anything else you have to say today?  
102 Don't hold on, let it flow  
103 Don't hold on, let it flow  
104 Do you have a name?  
105 Let Be

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UNDER PEER REVIEW IN IJAR



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107 I Am One Who:

108 Protects and shields

109 What I want from you is to reflect what we need and want to be the reality of this world and  
110 society

111 What I give to you is my caring and concern and effort

112 You will remember when we were all together fighting the fight against oppression and injustice,  
113 you will remember all those who came before and those who will continue on...

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116 The Sunflower Path

117 I am one who is strong and steady on my path

118 I am one who thru the rains, or storms, or anything that comes my way, I am prepared

119 And though I am one who will bend, I will not break

120 What I want you to remember is that despite all of the storms and rough weather or difficult  
121 paths I may encounter, that there is beauty all around me. There is life and colors and love.

122 My gift to you is peace, peace within uncertainties, peace within your own struggles, forgiveness,  
123 and grace.

124 I will remember when I take the time to stop and focus not just on bad things or the difficult  
125 things.

126 I will stop and look at the beauty around me, my friends, my family, my dad, and the memory of  
127 my mom.

128 You are strong. You are full of life. You are cute. You have the tools you need.



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130 I am one who loves plants

131 What I want you to remember is to be silly

132 What I give you is the freedom to live and grow

133 You will remember when you graduate

134 Stay present or life might pass you by.

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### 135 **Conclusion**

136 Cozolino (2013) describes social work practice as both an art and a science. This dual reality of  
137 social work practice extends to the human experience of social work students and professionals  
138 as well. They need sustainable practices that tend to both their personal and professional  
139 development and growth. SoulCollage® allows for both a scientific and artistic exploration. In  
140 the examples above, participants were able to share aspirations and possibilities of how they  
141 would like things to be and/ or magnify that which they do not always recognize. Tapping into  
142 these insights can be viewed as an act of self-care that centers self-exploration. At the same time,  
143 this process was conducted in a collective (i.e. collective care) and allows for participants to  
144 support each other as well. Collective support in an organization can aid in the sustainability and  
145 longevity for its members over time (Chamberlain, 2020). In conclusion, Seena Frost (2010) said  
146 it best when she described SoulCollage® as “working toward the balance of left- and right-brain  
147 hemispheres, and the balance of masculine and feminine energies. We are working to end the  
148 dualisms that separate people into good and evil camps by teaching that all beings are unique and  
149 at that the same time holy, each being blessed with a spark of Source” (p. 181 - 182).

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